

ANNUAL REPORT

2013-14





A LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT

May 28, 2014

Dear Friends,

One of the continuing joys of being President of Wisconsin Faith Voices for Justice is all the wonderful and inspiring people I get to meet and work with every day. As a relatively new organization with no paid staff, we rely heavily on volunteers and the in-kind contributions of clergy and congregations to help make our programs a success. Thank you so much to all our members for your ongoing help and support. Special thanks to the following who have gone above and beyond:

Madison-Area Urban Ministry for being a warm and supportive incubator and to **Linda Ketcham** for all your help and advice!

Our wonderful **Board of Directors** (find the list on p. 10)

To the volunteers for our **Poverty Simulation** who spent many, many hours creating the program: **Faith Markle, Linda Nettesheim, and Christine Thompson**

And to the volunteers who spent four hours training for the Simulation and then all day at the Simulation itself: (organizations for identification purposes only)

Karen Andro (First United Methodist Church)

Ron Baeseman (Lake Edge Lutheran)

John Egleston (PEPartnership, Intervarsity Christian Fellowship)

Kristin Gorton (Lake Edge UCC)

Peter Luisi-Mills (PEPartnership, Intervarsity Christian Fellowship)

Judy Magnus (St. John's Lutheran,

Janesville)

Barbara McKinney (MUM)

Diane Nolte (Lake Edge Lutheran)

Diann Oyan (Lake Edge Lutheran)

Sheila Spears (MUM)

Mark Taylor (Lake Edge Lutheran)

LaShawn Wanak (Intervarsity Christian Fellowship)

Gina Wilson (Second Harvest Food Bank)

To **Diane Kravetz** for being our official photographer for our Annual Meeting.

To **Monica Walker** for tabling for us at Holy Wisdom's Social Action Fair.

To **Boris Frank** for advising us on by-laws and governance questions

And to the following congregations:

Plymouth UCC for donating office space and co-sponsoring an ACA presentation

Temple Beth El's Social Action Committee for co-sponsoring an ACA presentation and the showing of Inequality for All

First United Methodist, Lake Edge Lutheran, PEPartnership for co-sponsoring the Poverty Simulation

FUMC, Lake Edge Lutheran and Orchard Ridge UCC for providing meeting space throughout the year

PEPartnership for web hosting and sharing office space

I am very grateful for all your commitment, support and passion for our work!!

Bonnie

Rabbi Bonnie Margulis

President

Wisconsin Faith Voices for Justice

ACCOMPLISHMENTS

HEALTH CARE REFORM

As people of faith, we believe that health care is a right that should be available, affordable, and accessible to all our citizens.

Christian teachings reflect a deep commitment to life and health. Healing the sick was an integral part of Jesus' life and ministry. Following Jesus' example, faith communities such as the Evangelical Lutheran Church of America, the United Church of Christ, the United Methodist Church, and others have called for universal health care for all, regardless of ability to pay. Jewish tradition teaches that saving a life is paramount, and so health care is considered first among the communal services the government must provide for a community. Stories are told of Buddha caring for sick monks as an example to others.

From the beginning, Wisconsin Faith Voices for Justice has been committed to work toward universal health care. Passage and implementation of the Affordable Care Act is a tremendous step forward toward that goal. As final implementation of the provisions of the ACA came closer, WFVJ increased our efforts to educate our communities about what the ACA means to each of us, to advocate for the full implementation of the ACA in Wisconsin, and to call for the Governor to accept the federal funding to expand BadgerCare.

Polls continue to show that many people are still confused about the ACA, how it works, how to access health insurance through the Marketplace, and what cost savings and cost-sharing provisions are available. The Kaiser Family Foundation's most recent poll shows only 6 in 10 women know that insurance plans must now cover annual physicals at no out-of-pocket cost, and 57 percent know that mammograms and pap tests are included at no additional cost.¹ WFVJ has been giving presentations to congregations and organizations to raise awareness of all these issues. In the six month Open Enrollment period, we made presentations to:

The Middleton Action Team

The East Side Progressives

Adults with ADHD Support Group

Temple Beth El (jointly sponsored by WFVJ and Temple Beth El's Social Action Committee)

WFVJ members (webinar jointly hosted with Citizen Action)

Plymouth United Church of Christ (jointly sponsored by WFVJ)

Lake Edge United Church of Christ

¹ <http://jama.jamanetwork.com/article.aspx?articleid=1869217>

Sadly, the Walker Administration not only refused federal funding to expand BadgerCare, they changed eligibility rules that resulted in 81,000 childless adults below the federal poverty line signing up for BadgerCare, but another 63,000 parents and caregivers above the poverty line being dropped.² The Walker Administration contends that all these people will be able to find affordable coverage in the Marketplace. What they neglect to acknowledge is that subsidies and cost-sharing provisions of the ACA are not intended to cover people between 100-135% of the poverty line.³ These people, who are struggling to make ends meet, will have a very tough time affording the premiums, deductibles, co-pays, and other out-of-pocket expenses. Furthermore, Citizen Action estimates that refusing the federal funding is costing Wisconsin \$1 million a day.⁴ Wisconsin Faith Voices for Justice believes providing affordable health care to our citizens is a moral imperative. Accepting the federal funding is not only the fiscally responsible thing to do, it is the right thing to do.

Wisconsin Faith Voices for Justice has been in the forefront of advocacy to the Walker Administration and the Senate and Assembly to accept the federal funding for BadgerCare. The good news is there is no sunset date by which Wisconsin must accept this funding. It is available and we should take it.

Our advocacy on this issue has included an op-ed published in the Capital Times⁵, letters to the editor in the Wisconsin State Journal⁶, testimony presented to the Joint Committee on Finance; and participation in press conferences throughout the year in partnership with Citizen Action Wisconsin.

The moral values of a society are measured by how it treats the least among us – the very young, the very old, the sick and the disabled. Wisconsinites pride themselves on being a moral and compassionate people. Therefore, Wisconsin Faith Voices for Justice continues to advocate to our state government to implement fully the provisions of the Affordable Care Act and to accept federal funding to expand BadgerCare, in order to ensure that no Wisconsin citizen ever again has to worry about affording needed health care.

² <http://www.channel3000.com/health/nearly-63000-wisconsin-residents-lost-medicaid/26054958>

³ <http://kff.org/interactive/subsidy-calculator/>

⁴ http://www.citizenactionwi.org/badgercare_petition2

⁵ **Health Care Access Is A Moral Imperative** http://host.madison.com/news/opinion/column/rabbi-bonnie-margulis-health-care-access-is-a-moral-imperative/article_dfc517f0-3195-52b3-a454-6354a55bcd1b.html

⁶ http://host.madison.com/wsj/news/opinion/mailbag/accept-federal-funding-to-expand-badgercare---rabbi/article_0b311236-0e72-50a4-848a-ca4b7473ae5a.html;
http://host.madison.com/wsj/news/opinion/mailbag/walker-pits-one-needy-group-against-another---/article_ab584646-36d9-5b06-9695-913d8fdd291f.html

REPAIRING THE SOCIAL SAFETY NET: HUNGER AND FOOD INSECURITY; HOUSING AND HOMELESSNESS

A tragedy of this, the richest country in the world, is that millions of people go to bed hungry, and millions go to bed in shelters and on the street. As people of faith, we are committed to heed the call of the prophets to feed the hungry, clothe the naked, and shelter the homeless. We do this as individuals, by volunteering at food pantries and shelters, donating canned foods, bringing our used clothing to Goodwill. We do this as congregations, housing food pantries and shelters, running food drives, and raising funds. And we do this when, as people of faith, we advocate for policies that help support the poor and lift low-income Americans out of poverty.

Wisconsin Faith Voices for Justice has focused our efforts this year on raising awareness of the real-life challenges low-income Wisconsinites face every day, and on advocating against cuts to the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP, aka food stamps), called FoodShare in Wisconsin. This year has seen particularly draconian cuts to SNAP on the federal level, and attempts to dictate food choices for FoodShare recipients locally.

After languishing in Congress for an unconscionably long time, the House and the Senate came to a compromise Farm Bill. The compromise ended the stalemate between the Senate bill which cut food stamps by \$4 million over ten years, and the House bill which would have cut a breathtaking \$40 billion over ten years. The final bill cut over \$8 billion over ten years. While an improvement over the House version, these cuts will potentially result in families losing an average of \$90 per month in benefits.⁷

Here in Wisconsin, Assembly Bill 110 would require SNAP recipients to limit 67% of their food purchases to those foods allowed to WIC recipients⁸. For families living in food deserts, where grocery stores and access to fresh foods is severely limited, this would mean a tremendous hardship. In addition, it puts store clerks in the position of being the ‘food police’, determining the percentage of the bill that has been spent on WIC approved foods and what hasn’t. Anti-hunger activists fear some stores may respond by refusing to participate in the food stamp program. The bill passed the Assembly but fortunately stalled in the Senate.

Throughout the debates on both the federal and the state level, WFVJ worked to keep our members informed and to move us all to action. We sent action alerts and periodic updates as the debate went on. We advocated not only against cuts to SNAP, but actually to increase the benefits. Studies from the Institute of Medicine and the Food Research Action Council show that the current benefits are far from adequate to provide nutritious meals for our nation’s families. Our second annual Food Stamp Challenge provided another avenue to raise awareness

⁷ <http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/govbeat/wp/2014/02/05/why-the-food-stamp-cuts-in-the-farm-bill-affect-only-a-third-of-states/>

⁸ <http://www.prwatch.org/news/2013/05/12095/wisconsin-bill-would-treat-organic-milk-sharp-cheddar-brown-eggs-junk-food>

among our members and provide some insight into the difficulty of feeding a family on such a limited budget.

Last year we set as one of our goals to create and pilot our own **Poverty Simulation**. The pilot took place on November 9, 2013 at First United Methodist Church, which co-sponsored the event along with PEPartnership, and Lake Edge Lutheran Church. This six-hour workshop provided an experiential opportunity to learn some of the many challenges and obstacles low-income Wisconsinites have to contend with every day just to get their most basic needs met. Two facilitators, thirteen volunteers and twenty-one participants spent the day together, walking together through the Simulation.

As participants gathered, the facilitators provided a very brief, deliberately uninformative, orientation. As the facilitators pointed out, people living in poverty do not get a “poverty fairy” coming to their aid, telling them where to go and what to do to access needed services. Participants were then each assigned a character and given a character description (all characters were based on composites of real life people), indicating their character’s name, age, educational attainment, employment situation, housing situation, whether they had a car, phone, and internet access, if they had dependents, their health history, and any other relevant information. They also were given points for money, transportation, phone time, health and energy, all depending on their individual profiles. Finally, each person was given a list of tasks to accomplish. The day was divided into six segments, each segment representing a day. During each ‘day’, they had to fulfill their tasks – e.g. find shelter for that segment; sign up for SNAP; sign up for BadgerCare; look for a job; visit a food pantry and/or ‘shop’ at the grocery with their SNAP benefits. Along the way, each person encountered obstacles – they did not have the correct ID; they needed a Social Security card; the pantry was closed when they got there; etc.

By the end of the day, people were tired and frustrated by all the challenges they encountered in trying to fulfill their tasks. Even though it was just one day, and even though it was just an exercise, participants felt they had begun to gain important insights into the daily struggles encountered by those living in poverty. **To bring the Poverty Simulation to your congregation or community, contact Rabbi Bonnie Margulis at rabbibonnie@charter.net.**

ECONOMIC JUSTICE

As people of faith, we believe in the basic worth and dignity of every human being. We believe that work is ennobling, and the ability to earn an honest day’s pay for an honest day’s work is a blessing. As Scripture teaches us: “You shall not abuse a needy and destitute laborer... You must pay out the wages due on the same day, before the sun sets, for the worker is needy and urgently depends on it (Deuteronomy 24:14–15).” Or, as one Buddhist leader has taught: “... from a Buddhist perspective it is not quite enough to say that we each are our brother's keeper. We need to feel instead that we actually *are* our brother. And from this, fair treatment flows naturally.

There is then what we Buddhists call Right Livelihood - mutually productive work, with everyone being treated fairly, everyone being treated Right.”⁹

Today we face an economic outlook that is as much a moral and justice crisis as it is a fiscal one, as the opportunities for meaningful work at a decent wage are increasingly scarce. In the face of this reality, it is the duty and responsibility of our government to help protect the rights of the workers. It is the duty and responsibility of employers to pay their workers a living wage, treat them fairly and with dignity, and ensure they have safe working conditions.

From the beginning, WFVJ has worked closely with the Interfaith Coalition for Worker Justice of South Central Wisconsin, as well as Citizen Action and Wisconsin Jobs Now, to advocate for fair wages and just working conditions. We have helped striking fast-food workers walk back to work after the strike, to ensure no repercussions will occur. We have protested against wage theft at Takara Japanese Restaurant.¹⁰

On January 22, Rabbi Bonnie Margulis spoke at press conference with Rep. Melissa Sargent and Rep. Mandela Barnes on their proposed legislation to ban discrimination against the long-term unemployed. On Feb 12, Rabbi Jonathan Biatch represented WFVJ at a press conference with Citizen Action, speaking against proposed legislation to void local living wage ordinances. His testimony was adapted as a letter to the editor which appeared in the Capital Times on Feb. 17.¹¹ Rabbi Margulis presented testimony before the Senate Committee on Judiciary and Labor on March 3, 2014 in opposition to the Senate version of the bill. Fortunately, the bill did not survive the Senate.

The increasing economic inequality that afflicts our society has become an important area of focus for our work. Over the past six months, we have been reaching out to sister organizations and faith communities to explore the possibility of building a coalition toward a state-wide Living Wage Campaign. We define ‘living wage’ widely, to include raising the minimum wage to living wage level, ensuring employers schedule workers for sufficient hours to make the hourly wage meaningful, paid sick leave and family leave, affordable health care, and affordable quality child-care.

To begin to raise awareness of this issue, WFVJ co-sponsored with Temple Beth El’s Social Action Committee a showing of former Labor Secretary Robert Reich’s new documentary, *Inequality for All*. Participants were energized and inspired to take action after seeing the film. We will be moving forward with this work in the coming year, providing programs and resources to educate our community, strengthening and deepening ties to sister organizations, and increasing activism to raise Wisconsin’s minimum wage.

⁹ <http://www.iwj.org/resources/buddhist> “A Buddhist View of Wage Theft” By Ven. Sevan Ross

¹⁰ http://host.madison.com/ct/news/local/writers/jack_craver/demonstrators-picket-state-street-sushi-spot-over-friday-lunch-hour/article_1aaaf954-cca9-11e3-b111-0019bb2963f4.html

¹¹ http://host.madison.com/ct/news/opinion/mailbag/rabbi-bonnie-margulis-attack-on-living-wages-unconscionable/article_13188585-8903-5c2f-9ca7-7387df87b064.html

MEMBERSHIP SUPPORT

Funding for Wisconsin Faith Voices for Justice comes solely through membership dues and the generosity of our supporters. Your dues and in-kind donations go to pay for all our programs – for web and listserv hosting; Xeroxing and materials for workshops and events; for outreach and publicity materials; for food at events; and for travel around the state. We continue to expand our membership donor base, and are exploring grant options from local and statewide foundations and other funding sources. Our goal for 2014-15 is to raise a minimum of \$10,000, to be able to hire a part-time Executive Director, to pay for web design and more professional printed materials; and to fund our Poverty Simulation, Advocacy Workshop, and other programs so that we can offer them to our member congregations at an affordable rate.

Madison-Area Urban Ministry serves as our organizational incubator and fiscal agent. MUM is an interfaith social justice organization that has spurred social change in and around Dane County. MUM's mission is to be "a prophetic voice for justice, neighbors working together for social change." MUM serves as an incubator and fiscal agent for innovative ideas and new projects in the Madison WI region. WFVJ is one of those projects. **As MUM is our fiscal agent, all membership dues and contributions should be made via check, made out to MUM, with a note that identifies them as dues or contribution to WFVJ.** Contributions made to WFVJ through MUM are tax-deductible.

Our dues structure is:

Congregation/Organization Over 200 members	\$100
Congregations/Organizations Under 200 members	\$ 50
*Individuals	\$ 25
*Students	\$ 10

*In cases of financial hardship, pay what you can, but please pay something.

All contributions and dues payments are much appreciated. Make checks payable to MUM and send to:

Rabbi Jonathan Biatch, Treasurer, WFVJ
c/o Madison-area Urban Ministry
22 Chautauqua Trail
Madison, WI 53719 Earmarked for WFVJ

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WISCONSIN FAITH VOICES FOR JUSTICE MEMBER CONGREGATIONS/ORGANIZATIONS

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